

The Van Luven Report

from

Rep. Steve Van Luven
48th District



**Chairman -
House Trade and Economic
Development Committee**

**1998
Session News**

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Dear friends,

We are nearing the middle of a 60-day session which began Jan. 12. Some late nights, weekends and holidays are being worked as we try to come to agreements on many of the issues facing the Legislature.

At the top of the list is how to deal with an \$861 million budget surplus. Many people are looking for ways to spend that money. Although there may be room for some tax cuts and satisfying transportation needs, most of it will likely be set aside in accordance with Initiative 601 in case of a future economic downturn.

As chairman of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee, my top priority of the session will be the creation of new jobs and efforts to keep our economy strong and thriving.

This newsletter outlines some of the goals and issues of the 1998 legislative session. I welcome your comments, ideas and questions as we enter the second half of session.

Steve Van Luven
Representative, 48th District

Surplus — spend or save?

The Legislature is currently deciding what would be the best direction for an \$861 million general fund surplus in the state's budget. A large portion of the money, about \$550 million, has been carried over from prior years. It is only one-time money, and if spent, will be gone.

There's a general consensus in Olympia to put much of this money into a rainy day fund. There's also a great amount of discussion about what to do with the rest of the money. Some want to use it to lower property taxes. Others want to lower the motor vehicle excise tax (money you pay to license your vehicle).

There's even a proposal to write a check to every man, woman and child in Washington state. Unfortunately, that would only be a one-time relief measure. If we are going to provide tax relief, I believe we need to look for permanent solutions, not just one-time relief.

How would you deal with the surplus? Put it in a rainy-day fund? Spend it all? Spend some and save some? If you were to spend some or all, where would you direct this money to be spent? These are some of the questions we are dealing with during this session.



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Moving ahead with transportation funding

House and Senate Republicans have committed to solve the transportation funding problem without the past methods of increasing taxes, including the gas tax.

There are several reasons why I agree with that approach.

First, we have a sizable surplus in the state budget. It doesn't make sense to ask taxpayers for more dollars when the state is already holding \$861 million of your money.

Second, we need to make sure that the Department of Transportation uses its money efficiently. We are spending millions of dollars to build new ferries which carry only a small percentage of our traffic, but move no commerce. Meantime, commuters on the Eastside continue to get bogged down in daily traffic because there is not enough highway capacity to support the demand. This doesn't make sense.

Third, much of the gas tax you pay in King County is distributed outside our area to other counties. We need to equalize the distribution of our gas tax revenue so that King County gets a dollar for every gas tax dollar generated in King County. Even if we did this for only three to five years, it would greatly benefit our local area.

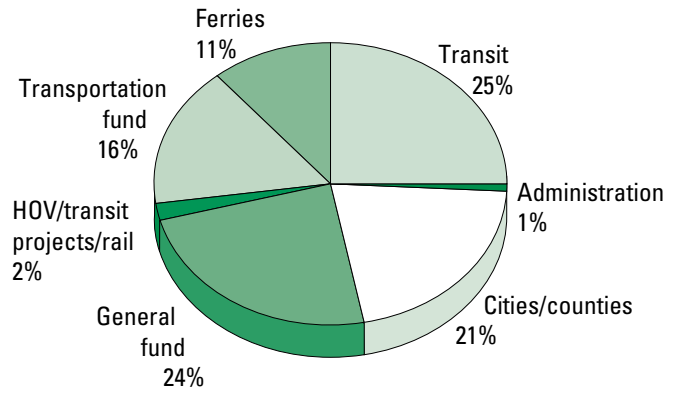
Currently, an audit is underway of the entire state Department of Transportation. A report is due in February. I think we need to study this report and then look into other areas, such as a transfer of the motor vehicle excise tax (MVET), to provide additional funding for transportation. A major component of the discussion underway in Olympia is to use more of the general fund portion of MVET for transportation. This is money you currently pay to license your vehicle.

Many people mistakenly think that when they buy their vehicle license tabs, that money all goes to transportation. Instead, much of it goes to the general fund.

Here is the breakdown of the motor vehicle excise tax:

MVET Distributions

Total 1997-99: \$1.59 billion



Cracking down on drunk drivers

Just under half of the traffic accidents in 1996 (1997 figures not yet available) where people were killed involved alcohol. This year, the Legislature is looking at ways to make our roads and highways safer by removing drunk drivers from behind the wheel. Here are some of the proposals being considered this year to crack down on drunk driving:

- Lower the illegal blood-alcohol concentration from .10 to .08
- Require certain people convicted of drunk driving to operate only vehicles equipped with ignition interlock devices
- Authorize impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license
- Authorize impoundment of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws
- Increase fines and jail times nearly threefold for people convicted of DUI; the maximum would be one year in prison, a \$2,000 fine and permanent license revocation for a person convicted of DUI who has two or more prior DUIs within seven years

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- Prohibit people convicted of DUI from obtaining an occupational driver's license or certificate of vehicle ownership, or from purchasing, renting or leasing a vehicle
- Require a motorist's driver's license to be administratively suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction
- Increase the sentence of someone convicted of DUI if that person has prior DUIs; an individual convicted of vehicular homicide would receive the standard sentence plus two years for every prior DUI conviction

Keeping the new Mariners' stadium family-oriented

One of my goals in sponsoring legislation that provided for a new Mariners' stadium three years ago was to make sure that plenty of affordable seating was offered for families. So I became very concerned this past fall when the Mariners announced new ticket prices.

From our negotiations with the Mariners, we were able to secure affordable seating. But they later announced that choice box seats behind home plate and the dug-outs, which cost \$22 last season, would be offered as a part of expensive luxury packages. Part of those packages include what is called, "The Diamond Club" — seating directly behind home plate at \$195 a seat. Nearly 1,000 more seats along the front row require personal seat licenses which sell for a one-time fee as high as \$25,000.

My greatest concern was that these \$195 seats would be sold to individuals whose opulence would be flaunted in front of the rest of the fans. It bothered me to think that white-coated waiters would be serving food and drinks to people in these seats — all in front of 45,000 other fans who could not afford this luxury. The stadium was built by the common person and not meant to be used only by the rich corporate types.

On December 5, I held a public hearing in Olympia to offer officials from the Mariners and from the Public Facilities District Board an opportunity to explain themselves. Mariners' officials explained the seating arrangements, but said there would not be white-coated waiters serving people behind home plate.

I remain committed to the goal of keeping this stadium family-oriented and affordable to the general public. That is why I am also considering legislation that would allow people to bring in their own food and beverages to the stadium so that they may have a picnic or family get-together as they are watching the game.



Rep. Steve Van Loven talks to reporters following a meeting of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee which he chairs.

Listen in on the Legislature

Any citizen who has a computer with a sound system and access to the Internet can listen to all deliberations of the Legislature live. The deliberations are also stored for later access on demand. This is a free service provided by TVW, the statewide nonprofit television network which is the equivalent of C-SPAN at the national level. Just visit TVW's web site at <http://www.tvw.org>. The required software, RealAudio, is also free and can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.real.com>. TVW is also seen on cable stations throughout the state. Unfortunately, cable access to TVW within the 48th District is limited. So I encourage you to contact your local cable company and ask them to carry TVW. You may also access current bill information on the Internet at: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/bills.htm>



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Goals of the 1998 session

- Remain steadfast in our commitment to protect taxpayers both by holding the line on state spending and by continuing to seek additional tax relief
- Continue efforts to improve the quality of education with a special emphasis on doing a better job of teaching reading so that our children will be better equipped to learn throughout their school careers
- Encourage greater parental involvement in the education of their children and provide more choices and options for students and parents
- Do more to protect our families, our homes and our communities from the threat of juvenile crime with a special effort to improve the security and monitoring of detention facilities
- Take action to stop dangerous criminals from being let loose in our communities where they pose a danger to our safety
- Do a better job of protecting society from the drunk drivers who are responsible for too many tragedies by taking away licenses, impounding cars and other strict penalties
- Find ways to responsibly and effectively meet the transportation needs of our state

Speak up, speak out!

I really appreciate the letters, phone calls and other correspondence received from you. As your state representative, nothing is more important to me than the constituents I serve. That is why I would like to ask you to note in your future correspondence to me that you live and/or work in the 48th District. In recent years, it has become more and more difficult to sort out mail (and now e-mail). That's because I am also receiving a lot of mail from people who live outside of the district. If I know that you are a 48th District resident or are employed within the district, it will allow me to respond quicker to your needs. So please speak up and speak out in future correspondence and let me know who you are.

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1998 Session News

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